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ABSTRACT

As today's society places more and more emphasis on preventive mental health, the use of counselors and psychologists as consultants on the radio is a viable alternative form of public education. The radio can be used to educate and inform the public about psychological issues. In 1982, a local radio station in Edmonton, Alberta aired the first program of "That's Living," a talk show that was hosted by psychiatrists and psychologists. This radio program provided a context where counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists communicate directly with the public. This program was built on the philosophy that people are important and can be educated and informed. The program operates in the following manner. The host presents a topic and initial comments; then the telephone lines are opened for calls, and the host answers questions related and unrelated to the topic of the show. Ethical guidelines have been developed for psychologists working in the mediums of radio and television by the Association of Media Psychologists. Information on additional counseling talk shows is included. (BHK)

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# Public Wellness - Preventive Mental Health*

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## INTRODUCTION

Until recently many people believed that our best hope for future solutions of human and individual problems lay in the realm of science. When Gordon Allport (1955) stated that theories of human behavior were based on the antics of captive and desperate rats, many counselors breathed a sigh of relief when a recognized scholar and psychologist confirmed what we had known all along.

This generation in the 1990's is the most highly educated in history even though controversy still exists as to actual numbers of illiterate individuals in our society. When we look at the number of people who have graduated from high school, the number of people entering post-secondary institutions and the numbers involved in self improvement and interest courses we know that percentages and actual numbers of educated people have increased. Recently two books appeared on the American market that questioned whether we do have an educated public. The two publications, The Closing of the American Mind by A. Bloom and Cultural Literacy by J. Hirsch, became best sellers. These two authors claimed that the number of educated people had not been on the rise. Yet it is amazing to see the number of people who bought these two books and made them best sellers.

Even though we have a larger population of highly educated and trained people, many of us still, to a large extent see signs applying the same formulas to issues as if the public were uneducated and uninformed. Because of the large numbers of educated people and an increase in the number of individuals wishing to raise their level of education, counselors must join other educators in finding alternate ways to reach them. The media is now playing a significant role in informing and educating the viewing and listening public.

In 1982 a local AM radio station in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada aired the first program of That's Living, a talk show hosted by psychiatrists and psychologists. This program has aired continuously every weekday to at least this date, April, 1991. It is in the context of this radio program where counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists communicate directly with the public, that this paper is presented.

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**930 CJCA'S THAT'S LIVING**

From the beginning this program was built on the philosophy that people are important and can be educated and informed. The concept originated with an Edmonton psychiatrist, Dr. Robbie Campbell, who utilized two of his friends, psychologist Dr. John Paterson and psychiatrist Dr. Carl Blashko as frequent substitute hosts when his busy schedule did not allow him to host his own program. Before the program had aired more than six months, Drs. Paterson and Blashko became co-hosts, one or the other hosting each weekday until 1985. At that time Dr. Blashko took a respite from the program and Dr. Paterson was joined by his colleague Dr. Henry Janzen. At the present time psychologist and counselor educators Drs. Janzen and Paterson, along with Dr. Blashko alternate as hosts and are still active with the program.

Listeners accepted the idea of radio counseling right from the start. 930 CJCA is one of 18 radio stations in the Edmonton area and from 2:05 to 3:30 p.m. approximately 16% of all radios in this large area are tuned in to That's Living (Paterson & Blashko, 1985). The program was well received in broadcasting circles, in 1985 That's Living was awarded the Gold Ribbon Award by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters and was adjudged to be the top public affairs radio program in Canada. It is estimated that approximately 30,000 listeners are available for each 15 segment of air time (Paterson & Blashko, 1984/85).

The program operates in the following manner. The host for the day presents a topic and priming comments lasting from approximately 5 to 8 minutes. The host counselor is responsible for the material given in this segment of the program and these data are carefully researched. The lines are then opened to listeners and the host interacts with callers answering questions on and off topic. Occasionally guests are brought in to provide information on a specific topic, but these programs are often focussed and less flexible, as each of the three co-hosts has now become familiar to radio audiences in northern Alberta.

The co-hosts of That's Living have published three books, two of them Canadian best sellers, on topics of interest to the public generated from the radio show. They have also published approximately one dozen professional articles in refereed journals throughout the world. In the last five years Drs. Paterson, Janzen and Blashko have presented addresses on media counseling throughout Canada as well as at professional gatherings and conferences in the United States, England, Ireland, Finland, Singapore, New Zealand, Switzerland and Japan.

**PREVENTION AS A HEALTH STRATEGY**

One of the advantages held by a counselor radio host is public visibility. The three co-hosts of That's Living insisted from

day one of the program that public education and research would be a feature of their work in media. For this reason workshops and seminars became a regular part of the radio format, for listeners and hosts could meet face to face to discuss issues, dealing primarily with education and preventive health.

It is the belief of this author that there are three requirements for primary prevention when we communicate directly with the public. The requirements are as follows:

1. Preventive programs must be grouped or mass oriented, not targeted to specific individuals.

2. These programs must be designed for well, not sick people.

3. They must be designed to promote psychological health and well-being.

There does not seem to be a real reason why educators, medical practitioners, counselors and psychologists need to work on a continuing basis on a one-on-one or small group situation. With rapid improvement in technology it seems ludicrous that we are utilizing techniques in the 1990's, more appropriate to the 1920's. Members of an educated public deserve the opportunity to hear positive health messages from leaders in our profession, rather than hearing the same message in a counselor's office. Our health schemes in both the United States and Canada are geared toward cures for diagnosed illness when a very appropriate use of practitioner time could be in preventive health measures and preventive educational programs. These programs work. In Finland, a bold experiment utilizing the advantages of television as an interactive medium was instituted (McAllister, 1977). A series of TV sessions were presented to volunteer-led viewing groups to facilitate smoking cessation. Post-program survey data indicated that approximately 40,000 people had participated in the project and that at the end of six months, about 10,000 of the participates had still refrained from smoking. The researchers are presently pursuing the value of TV and other forms of behavioral and psychological counseling.

Radio shows have also expanded their programming to include talk shows which deal with personal issues. The University of Miami, Florida, has used the student radio station, WVUM, to develop a program to help students (Zwibelman & Rayfield, 1982) acquire tips for: studying, building self-esteem and confidence, dealing with school stress, drug use and abuse, career decisions, loneliness and depression, and male and female sex roles. After brief talks, listeners are invited to call in with questions and comments to which peer counselors respond. Psychiatrists like Dr. Harvey Ruben (1986) have also hosted radio talk shows. Ricks (1984) has also discussed the rise of interactive radio and its potential as a form of social support. Interactive radio can be a method of reducing isolation and promoting community mental health. It gives listeners a chance to participate in networking

and dialogue. Paterson and Blashko (1984/85) have also expounded upon the value of educationally oriented mental health programs and their potential for preventive health programs.

Grasha and Levi (1983) have also discussed the positive aspects of the use of radio to reach large audiences. To do this with a proper ethical stance means that the programs have to be educational and informative. They see radio as providing the following benefits to listeners:

1. People acquire information regarding how they and others behave and some of the reasons why certain actions occur.

2. Listeners learn that other people have similar problems to theirs.

3. People get ideas for how to handle personal problems and to make better decisions.

4. Listeners are exposed to alternative points of view on topics that they thought were cut and dried.

5. People get to see that their personal points of view about behavior are sometimes consistent with those of professionals and their ideas are not silly or stupid.

6. Listeners learn that professionals are not perfect, they disagree with one another, and sometimes they have a sense of humor (pp. 5-7).

George Miller (1969) argued that "psychologists need to give it away", and he was talking about psychology. At that time, he was pointing out that people needed to know that psychology existed in a manner that could be used in everyday affairs. It was not restricted to the laboratory or classroom. If it was to serve a purpose and function, it should be accessible to the general public. He pointed out that selfishness was not in the best interests of the profession or society. Radio gives the public a chance to become acquainted with some of the knowledge that psychology has and that it should share.

All of you are aware of the growth of parent study groups, adult education program expansion, assertiveness training workshops, self-improvement workshops, interest in personal growth and awareness and the public's interest in these areas. The one-to-one relationship that is applicable to counseling and therapy sessions is not necessarily the one that is most applicable and practical for general interest information that psychology can provide. Psychology is generally understood by the population through publications like Psychology Today, television and radio. Unfortunately not enough of the top people in the mental health field are involved in more modern approaches to sharing the information and knowledge that psychology has to offer. Some of the methods employed and the attitudes of

psychologists are appropriate to the 1920's, not the 80's. At this time, we are poorly represented in the media.

However, because of the demand and the expansion of psychology into the arena of the media, ethical guidelines have been set in place by an association formed in 1982 - the Association of Media Psychologists. There are now guidelines and ethics that are specified for psychologists working in the mediums of radio and television. These have been put in place to meet the demands of the public and guide the performance of a new psychologist - the media counselor.

**THE RADIO COUNSELOR AS CONSULTANT**

Psychology can be understood by the general public. It is not a scholarly or private affair. Although this is not a classroom or research center, it does not mean that radio cannot be used to educate and inform the public about psychology. Hans Selye (1974), an author and notable researcher on the subject of stress, distrusted research proposals for the simple reason that if you know what you want to find, you will find it. That's similar to saying that if all you have is a hammer, you'll see a lot of nails. If you want to find negative aspects to educating the public about psychology through the mass media, you'll find it. As Dale Carnegie once phrased it, "Any fool can criticize, condemn and complain--and most of them do." But psychology should be accessible to everyone. It is estimated that now children watch about 15,000 hours of television--about one-and-a-half times as much as they spend in school. If you want to reach these young people, what is the most efficient way to do so? And what is the best way to do so? Look at the alternatives.

With emphasis on mental health, especially prevention and not cure, the use of counselors and psychologists as consultants is a viable alternative. The emphasis in therapy is and should be different. There is a lot of exposure for preventive programs in film, on radio and television. Educational systems have been using audio-visual technology as an aid to instructional programming for a long time. Psychology, as an educational and informational tool, can be effective in the same way. In the 60's, Marshall McLuhan said, "The medium is the message". And that is where we are with psychology--scholarship need not be defined and presented only in print form.

*This paper was presented at the American Association for Counseling and Development Annual Convention in Reno, Nevada, April, 1991. This paper was one of three presented under the program title "Promoting Public Wellness Through the Mass Media - Radio Counseling". The sponsoring division was the American Mental Health Counselors Association.

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